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## NESTING SITES OF THE PARULA WARBLER IN THE POTOMAC VALLEY

BY ROGER TORY PETERSON

FRANK M. CHAPMAN once said the finding of a Parula Warbler's nest should be marked on the calendar as a red-letter day. During the summer of 1936, we had thirteen such red-letter days at the Audubon Nature Camp on Hog Island in Muscongus Bay, Maine. All thirteen nests were suspended in *Usnea*. Later, I also saw nests of the Parula Warbler (*Compothlypis americana*) in Florida and the Carolinas. These were in Spanish Moss, an epiphyte not even remotely related to the lichen *Usnea* but superficially very like it. I thought of the Parula as a beautiful example of a bird whose distribution could not be shown to fit either the Life Zone or the Biome concepts. Rather, as with a great many other birds, its distribution seemed to be determined by the "life form" or physical appearance of certain plants that provided its proper niche.

I was puzzled when I first went to Washington, D.C., for the Parula was common along the Potomac, and neither *Usnea* nor Spanish Moss was present. However, I found the Parulas using approximately the same niche as those I had observed before—nesting low, in the tangled tufts of drift lodged by high water floods in the branches of riverside trees and bushes. Petrides (1942. *Wilson Bulletin*, 54:252) reported "two nests in bunches of dead leaves and debris caught, during a flood earlier that spring, in low branches of deciduous trees bordering the Potomac River," and I am told by Maurice Brooks that the Parulas of West Virginia also nest in such tufts, which furnish the same type of nest site as Spanish Moss and *Usnea*.

Plate 7, a photograph by Ralph E. Lawrence, of Washington, D.C., shows an example of one of these nests along the Potomac. In this case, the "niche" is a narrow strip of burlap left folded over a limb of a box elder sapling by flood waters. The female warbler was observed pulling fibers from the burlap and weaving them into the nest on April 24 (1946). She was also seen pulling slender strips from the last season's ragweed. By June 3 the pair of warblers was feeding four young in the nest. One of the young left the nest June 7, the day the photograph was taken. The others left before seven o'clock in the morning, June 9.

1206 Mt. VERNON BOULEVARD, ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA